

Ganbatte, or Auntie Kinue Does Her Best

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Ganbatte, or Auntie Kinue Does Her Best

by [frogfarm](#)

Summary

These days she spends most of her time in the lab. Today, Kinue hopes to deal with a more human problem.

Pre-series. Kinue POV.

Notes

Ryuko is seventeen at the start of Kill la Kill, so this is set five years previously.

The sound of the bell nearly startled her. Instead it warned her to brace for impact as the entire row of doors up and down the hallway was flung open and an orderly swarm of middle school students poured forth, rushing past and around her in a raging flood. It was like watching a primal force of nature, each and every one of them madly striving to keep their youthful energy in check.

"Can I help you?" Like most of her colleagues, the teacher was quite young and pretty. That she was addressing someone equally young and pretty would have put most women her age somewhat ill at ease. The fact that she showed no sign of it was a testament to her professionalism.

The newcomer offered a respectful nod.

"I'm looking for Ryuuko Matoi." A frown crossed over her finely chiseled features. "This is her classroom -- yes?"

"I'm afraid we had to send her to the principal's office." Though the smile remained, the teacher's cheerful demeanor was notably diminished. "Again."

"I'm sorry." Her response was automatic. "If you could just --"

"It's the third time this month." The teacher smiled to indicate the lack of hard feelings. "It certainly took someone long enough to come."

"Her father is a very busy man." Again the words came as if by rote.

The teacher shook her head.

"Well, I imagine the principal will be just as glad to be rid of her --" The teacher gave an embarrassed cough. "For the rest of the day."

"I see." The newcomer bowed her head once more. "Thank you."

Armed with knowledge and a freshly stamped hall pass, she went in search of the principal's office. As it turned out, her goal was not far from where she had entered the building. And there, sitting in a chair by the door with crossed arms and a sullen glare, was her actual target.

To look at Ryuuko Matoi, one would never imagine she was anything but a normal twelve-year old girl. Unless one knew her secret, or were to somehow guess at the significance of the crimson streak that ran through a single dangling forelock of her hair. Countless teachers had threatened all manner of dire punishment for its presence, even forcing her to undergo hour-long scrubs in a futile effort to remove the offending color. Eventually word had gotten around that for whatever reason, her outlandish decoration was wholly and regrettably natural. The system would just have to deal with it. And with Ryuuko Matoi.

The visitor was doing her best not to stare. Still, it was the first time in years they had been this close. Hardly a surprise if the girl didn't recognize her. If anything, she radiated

antisociability. It flowed out from her in almost visible waves, a pulsing field of oppression pushing away all who came within its aura.

"Not you again!"

The door to the inner office had opened, disgorging a short and balding man wearing an unfashionably thick pair of glasses. His stocky build was just beginning to turn to fat, with what looked like a normally cheerful expression that was currently anything but.

"I told you the last time." The principal sounded as though he were just getting warmed up. "Either your father comes down here to claim you, or I'm calling the police. We cannot tolerate this sort of lawless and violent behavior. And if you think..."

"Sir?" The secretary behind the counter finally managed to secure the man's attention. "You have a visitor."

"Quite busy," the principal muttered, turning to face her. "Really. Quite --"

"Sir?" She bowed low. "My name is Kinue Kinagase."

"I see." The man cleared his throat and straightened his tie. "And what can I do for you?"

"I work as an assistant to Doctor Isshin Matoi."

Across the room, Ryuuko's heel had been idly lifting and returning to the floor with a thud. At the sound of these words, all motion ceased.

"May we speak privately?"

"Hmph." The principal's eyes narrowed as he sent a suspicious glare at Ryuuko.

Kinue remained silent, holding her head high. It was a gamble, but one worth taking. Her impeccable dress and grooming, her educated accent, all spoke for her in ways more profound than any actual words. She had only to wait but a moment before she was being ushered into the inner sanctum.

"Please forgive my manners." The principal pulled out a chair for her, allowing her to fully compose herself. "Kinagase, was it?"

"Yes, sir." It seemed best to keep things formal. "I must apologize for Doctor Matoi's absence. If anything, it's my own fault for not checking his messages more thoroughly. But he is an incredibly busy man --"

"So I'm told." The principal strolled around to the far side of his desk, hands behind his back.

"But I'm here now." Kinue leaned forward, projecting earnest intensity. "And I will do everything I can to make sure this never happens again."

The principal narrowed his eyes. "Will you, now?"

With a silent prayer, Kinue bowed her head.

"Please give her one more chance."

Two minutes later, they were standing on the sidewalk in front of the school. Ryuuko still looked ready to lash out at the first person to come too close to her personal space. She stood with her hands jammed into her coat pockets, an air of uncertainty emanating from every pore.

"I'm a friend of your father's," Kinue said.

A look of distaste contorted Ryuuko's pretty features before she quickly forced them into a semblance of neutrality.

"Not that kind of friend." Kinue kept her tone light, trying to gauge the level of Ryuuko's anger.

"I don't care if you're his best friend." A glint of hostility glittered deep in Ryuuko's eye. "I'm not going anywhere with you."

Kinue half-turned, looking over her shoulder. "I'll buy you lunch."

She could see Ryuuko swallowing her immediate retort, staring the older woman up and down. In her mind she could see herself: The latest in tasteful mid-length skirts, combined with a perfectly coiffed businesswoman's bun, all indicated a first-class person who was eminently respectable.

Ryuuko shrugged, affecting disdain. "Whatever."

"Do you have a preference?" Kinue wasn't expecting more than another shrug. At least she got that.

"There's at least three decent restaurants within walking distance." She kept her voice low, as gentle as she was able. "Shall I pick one?"

"Stop it!" Ryuuko's anger flared and just as quickly collapsed into smoldering embers. "Just...don't."

"Don't what? Give you a choice?" Kinue dared to hazard a deeper dive. "Be nice to you?"

Ryuuko turned away, arms folded over her chest, drawing deep breaths. For a moment Kinue wasn't sure if the girl would try to make a run for it or simply burst into tears.

Instead Ryuuko lowered her hands to her sides, clenching them into fists. When she turned back around her face was a mask, with only a muted trace of the previous hostility.

"Let's go to Fat Fang." Kinue did her the courtesy of pretending not to notice. "It's closest. And they have omurice."

It was early for the lunch crowd, and the restaurant was thinly populated. Nonetheless, Kinue made sure to get a table at the back for maximum privacy. She waited until they had both tea and menus in hand before resuming her attempt to bridge the gap.

"Ryuuko."

The girl's sullen glare shifted from her teacup to the woman across from her.

"What do you know about your father's work?"

That threw Ryuuko off balance. Mistrust and anger were still visible on her face. But now there was confusion, in equal measure.

"I..." Ryuuko sighed, staring back down into her teacup. "I know he's a scientist."

Kinue allowed her a moment before pressing. "And?"

"And...that's it." Ryuuko looked up and shook her head. "I never got --"

Again Kinue waited. When Ryuuko spoke, her voice was more subdued.

"I never asked."

About to reply, Kinue saw the waitress approaching. To her great relief, they managed to complete their order without causing a diplomatic incident. She watched Ryuuko watching the other woman walk away, slouched back once more in her seat, refusing any and all attempts at connection.

"I don't want to speak for your father," Kinue said. "I wouldn't presume. But I know -- because he said so, more than once -- that he loves you."

Ryuuko's right hand kept forming into a fist. Unclenching, repeating, over and over. Her bangs fell forward just far enough for the streak of red to obscure her eyes, her lips compressed into a thin pale line.

"That it breaks his heart not to be able to see you. Or when he hears..." Kinue's emotion was subdued, but clear as day. "That things aren't going well."

"Sure." Ryuuko's voice wobbled as she cleared her throat, her words as rough as sandpaper. "That's why you're here. Instead of him."

"I'm here because I care. About you." Kinue emphasized this final word, leaning forward. "I'm on a fast track. Education, cutting edge research. I might not ever have children of my own."

Ryuuko raised her head, wearing a distinct scoff. "Maybe you should."

"But I am more than a friend to your father."

Ryuuko's defiance retreated again, again becoming wary.

"I'm also his assistant. Working on a very important project." Without raising her voice, Kinue put all the urgency and emphasis she could possibly muster into her declaration. "It's no exaggeration to say that if your father's research fails --"

She broke off, overwhelmed. How much was it safe to reveal? Isshin Matoi had deliberately chosen to keep Ryuuko ignorant of her nature. Of her own mother's orders to him that had resulted in Life Fibers being permanently fused with her own DNA, creating the first true hybrid of human and alien. Of how she had been cast out and discarded like garbage when her heart stopped beating. Only for her father, wracked with anguishing guilt, to rescue her from the trash heap and bring her back to life. And so a father's love became the belief that his daughter was humanity's only defense against her mother's mad visions of conquest and destruction.

But Kinue had missed her moment. She could tell; Ryuuko was closed off once more, looking around for the waitress. Who came whisking out of the kitchen bearing their trays at that precise moment, thankfully sparing them further awkwardness.

They ate their meal in silence. Ryuuko was clearly hungry, trying not to bolt her food. As they were finishing up, Kinue spoke.

"It won't always be like this."

"How do you know?" But Ryuuko's retort lacked any real bite. It was the voice of resignation, one that knew better than to expect anything else.

"I'm not that old." Kinue allowed herself a brief smile. "But I do know one thing."

Ryuuko was already rising from her seat, throwing her backpack over one shoulder with a businesslike air. "What's that?"

"No matter how bad things are? Part of growing up is putting all that in perspective." Kinue didn't move, looking up at Ryuuko, hands folded in her lap. "Figuring out what's really important."

"What's important to me is not getting stuck with the check." Ryuuko turned her back on the table, offering a jaunty wave as she strolled away.

With a heavy heart, Kinue went to the register. As she was paying the bill, the front door swung open.

"Hey! Lady!"

She turned her head to see Ryuuko's poking through the door. "Yes?"

Ryuuko struggled for a second. Finally she shrugged in defeat.

"Thanks."

When Kinue emerged from the restaurant, the street was deserted. She was just in the process of remembering where she'd parked when her phone rang.

"Yes?"

"We need you back at the lab." Her brother's voice was uncharacteristically excited. *"Doctor Matoi thinks this could be it."*

"I'll be right there."

She had failed to reach Ryuuko. But if their experiments succeeded, perhaps the girl could be spared. Perhaps they would all be spared.

She could only hope.

And continue to do her best.

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